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NEA/ELA (IRWIN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/10/2012
TAGS: PREL EAID MASS MARR EG IS
SUBJECT: EGYPT: OCTOBER MILITARY WRAP-UP

REF: A. CAIRO 2800

¶B. CAIRO 2801
¶C. CAIRO 3017

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stuart Jones for
reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Embassy Cairo's OMC Chief discussed border security and his recent meetings on FMF with members of Congress with Assistant Minister of Defense for Armament MG Fouad abd el Halim, Assistant Minister of Defense for Policy MG Mohamed el Assar, and American Affairs Chief MG Ahmed Mo'taz on October 19. The OMC Chief reiterated his request that Egypt take concrete measures to demonstrate its commitment to countering smuggling. The Egyptian Generals explained that Egypt had done the "maximum" by making border security procurement a priority for FY08 and noted that the FMF debate in Congress was ruining Egyptian-Israeli relations. End summary.

OMC Chief Briefs MoD on Discussions with Congress

¶2. (C) On October 9, the OMC Chief, accompanied by poloff, briefed the Egyptian Generals on the outcome of his recent visit to Washington and his meetings with members of the Congress about the proposal to condition USD 200 million of Egypt's FMF for FY08. He said the mood in Congress towards Egypt had changed significantly since his last visit in June 2007, noting that former supporters of Egypt are now less inclined to lobby on Egypt's behalf. The OMC Chief said that Senator Chambliss advised him to "tell our good friends the Egyptians that there is a new sheriff in town" and that things will be different. He said other members emphasized that conditioning USD 200 million was "a compromise" because some members wanted to cut the assistance completely.

¶3. (C) The OMC Chief stressed that the most common point of concern raised by members was the perception that Egypt is not doing enough to stem the smuggling through the Gaza border. He told the Generals that while Minister of Defense Field Marshal Tantawi's decision to make border security procurement the highest priority for FY08 was a good measure, some members consider it insufficient. He repeated his request for a FMS case aimed at exploring ways to enhance tunnel detection, his request that Egypt host a regional border security symposium (with the NESA Center), and his request that MoD allow an Army Corps of Engineers "tunneling

expert" to visit the border to assess the utility of tunnel detection technologies.

Egypt has taken the "maximum step" on border security

¶4. (C) MG Al Assar, who had recently returned from leading the Ministry of Defense "White Paper" delegation to Washington, reported that all 34 members of Congress and professional staff members he met during the week of 24 September appreciated Egypt's strategic role in the region. He said the "White Paper" itself was extremely effective and that the one-page summary of counter-smuggling statistics was persuasive. "When the members heard the facts, they changed their minds," Al Assar said, observing that Egyptian Ambassador Fahmy, by contrast, had failed in his many meetings on the Hill to persuade members of Egypt's effectiveness in countering smuggling.

¶5. (C) In response to the OMC Chief's request that Egypt do more to secure the border, Al Assar said that he "never would have predicted" that Field Marshal Tantawi would prioritize border security cases. This is "the maximum step we could take," he said, noting "Egypt cannot be threatened; we will not work under conditions." He said the Egyptian public is pressing the government to refuse the "200 million or the whole 1.3 billion." On hosting the border security symposium, Al Assar said "there is no way we can have Israelis here while we are lectured on how to protect our borders." Al Assar said that what Egypt needs is another border guard unit. On the visit of a tunneling expert, Al Assar and MG Ahmed Mo'taz said separately that this would not help and that the mere suggestion "touched a nerve." Al Assar said that the Egyptian DATT in Washington learned from U.S. defense contractors that the only tunnel detection equipment that may be of use to Egypt is still in the R&D stage.

¶6. (C) Al Assar pushed for more proactive engagement by the Administration, and asked why the Secretaries' letter does not state that Egypt is doing all that it can to counter smuggling. Poloff explained that the letter was clear in rejecting the conditions. We do not believe it is effective, poloff and OMC Chief stressed, to emphasize the details of the counter smuggling effort, particularly because the facts and statistics (offered by both Egypt and Israel) are difficult to verify. Al Assar responded that U.S. officials are welcome at the border any time and can thereby verify Egypt's statistics. Poloff noted that such visits do not provide opportunities to verify anything because we are always shown the same tunnels -- a problem that poloff and others have complained about repeatedly. Al Assar and Mo'taz said they were unaware of this problem and promised to address it.

Impact of FMF Debate on Egyptian-Israeli relations

¶7. (C) Al Assar said that the real problem on the border stems from Israel. Mo'taz said "you always accept the Israeli lobby's version of events. We have information that the Israelis are trying to destroy the U.S.-Egyptian relationship." He added: "The Egyptian-Israeli relationship used to be strong, but this talk is ruining it. We understand that they have an internal political problem with giving us the tools we need (more troops) to do this job. But the U.S. should tell them that raising this publicly and in Congress is wrong. We took a step with making border security cases a priority, now Israel needs to take a step."

"We need ADM Fallon"

¶8. (C) Al Assar asked whether CENTCOM Commander ADM Fallon would be willing to engage Congress on Egypt's behalf. He also asked if the OMC Chief would advise other members of Congress that Egypt is doing the maximum on border security. The OMC Chief said he would not do more on the Hill without

more cooperation from Egypt and that he could not speak for ADM Fallon. Al Assar stressed that "ADM Fallon is respected and is able to influence. They will listen to the Commander of troops in the Middle East." The OMC Chief again pushed the Generals to tell him what Egypt will do on border security, but cautioned that we must not let the debate on border security spoil our strategic relationship.

JONES